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Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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THE "P.R." LETTER BAG.

[The Editor is not responsible for the opinions of Correspondents.]

DEAR EDITOR,—A College is about to be established under the auspices of the Manchester Gentlewomen's Employment Association, for the purpose of providing a thorough training for ladies as children's nurses. The students will be resident in the College for a period of six months, during which time they will be instructed in everything that relates to the care of children from their earliest infancy up to the age of five or six years. Practical experience will be gained from the fact of a number of children of varying ages (including quite young infants) being also resident in the College, which, so far as the children are concerned, will answer the purpose of a Convalescent or Holiday Home for town children. This nursery department will constitute an entirely new but most essential feature, and the College will in consequence be the only institution of the kind in the country which will combine the opportunity for complete practice and theory under one roof. There will be a resident staff of competent teachers and the whole will be under the care of a Lady Principal of large and varied experience. There is a very great demand for lady nurses who have had training and experience, and the salaries that such women can demand are considerably more than are within the horizon of the ordinary untrained mother's helps or nursery governesses.

I am, truly yours.

R. W. W.

DEAR EDITOR,—We all know what we owe to the P.N.E.U. To some of us its principles have become our opinions, its suggestions have grown into our practices, its teaching has opened to many abiding joys, and in following its methods there are those who have tapped springs of unexciting pleasure which never fail "in bright or dull days."

In proportion to a sense of gratitude is usually the desire to share, and so, stimulated by what I owed personally to the spirit and teaching of the P.N.E.U., it was decided by the active aid of Mr. R. E. S. Hart, now of the Education Department, and with the full sympathy of the Council of The Children's Country Holiday Fund, to try and awaken an interest in Nature in the minds of some of the 32,000 children, who last year were sent by the agency of that Fund away from London for two weeks of unfettered pleasure into the homes of village cottagers. Moreover, what could be done had been shown by Mrs. Franklin, who some few years ago exhibited in Toynbee Hall a collection of leaves, flowers and grasses which children of the cultivated classes had collected when in the country.

Last May it was my pleasant privilege to read a paper at the Conference of The Parents' National Educational Union, describing the plan we pursued. Part of that paper appeared in *The Nineteenth Century*, and aroused considerable newspaper comment, both adverse as well as in favour of our object and efforts; but it has also brought a little active

help, and has started some people in other parts of the country trying the same experiment.

It is always difficult to reach large numbers of the very people to whom one wants to make a new proposal, but aided by many of the London Board School Teachers, we were able to put the following letter into the hands of some 15,000 children:—

CHILDREN'S COUNTRY HOLIDAY FUND.

Patroness: H.R.H. THE PRINCESS OF WALES.

Chairman: The Rev. CANON BARNETT.

Hon. Treasurer: The Hon. ALFRED LYTTLETON.

Secretaries: Mr. E. J. URWICK. Mr. R. E. S. HART. Miss FINLAY.

MY DEAR CHILDREN,

Some of us who are grown up know how much good and pleasure has been brought to us, all through our lives, by making friends with and caring to look at beautiful things in the country.

We also know that there are children who go into the country for their fortnight's holiday and return to London without having learnt the difference between an oak leaf and an elm leaf, or between the song of a blackbird and the chirp of a wren, or between a rose and honeysuckle. This seems such a pity, and so to help you to look on the beautiful and interesting things which Almighty God has made, and which live in the country, we are going to ask you a few questions and see if you cannot collect some different sorts of leaves and flowers, and perhaps some of you will be able to draw an animal or two, and explain to us the sounds they make or the habits they have.

Have you ever lain quite still and watched the shy, dainty rabbits, and how they run and nibble? And the geese, what do they do on the commons? And how do the ducks behave to the soft, yellow balls called ducklings? Or can you tell what the cows do every day after their dinner? Perhaps the water rats have been seen by you, or you may have caught a glimpse of a happy squirrel and wondered what he was or how he lived.

At the end of your visit in the country we are going to ask those of you who like to try to answer a few questions on what you have observed during your stay away from London, and then to the best boys and girls we are going to give prizes. To those boys and girls who will try and draw the flowers and the creatures, we shall also give prizes—but everyone who sends us either an examination paper, or some pressed leaves, or a posy of wild flowers, or a drawing, must be very careful to put his or her name and address, and also his or her age, as well as his or her standard and the name of the school on the paper, because, as you will see, it would not be fair if we gave the prize to Mary, who was in the 5th standard, because her answers, or drawing, or collection, was so much better than that of Willie, who was only in the 3rd standard, and yet how could we tell unless you had written it down?

Now, dear children, we hope you will like our little plan for you. We are sure you will enjoy it all *very* much indeed if you once begin, and we shall be interested in what you send to us; and you will remember, we hope, that if you ask a grown lady or gentleman to help you, you must tell us about it.

We, are, dear children,

Your friends,

HENRIETTA O. BARNETT

and

R. E. S. HART.

Toynbee Hall, Whitechapel.

THIS IS THE SORT OF EXAMINATION PAPER WHICH WILL BE SET FOR STANDARDS III AND IV.

- I. Does the cow lick in the grass with her tongue, or does she chew it as the rabbit does with her front teeth? Which does the sheep do? Does the sheep move its upper or lower jaw when it eats? Do sheep drink water?
- II. Which grows the tallest—wheat, barley, or oats? Which was cut first this year? Could you draw or describe an ear of barley? Which is bread made from?
- III. Can you draw the shape of an oak leaf and also how the acorns grow? Do one or more cluster together? What colour is the inside of the little cup? Have you seen an oak apple? Which is the seed of the oak?
- IV. Tell me the number of different flowers which you were able to count in the prettiest cottage garden which you saw, and also add as many of their names as you could learn.
- *V. Pick, press, and name in an exercise book, the six flowers or leaves which you like best among the following:—Daisy, dandelion, poppy, harebell, convolvulus, cranesbill or storksbill, toadflax, bramble, ivy, fern.
- VI. Tell me about the chickens. Does the mother feed them, or do they find their own food? Does she call them to rest under her wings, and do they always obey? How many were in the biggest brood you saw?
- VII. Which is your favourite tree—an oak or an elm, a beech or a birch, a lime or a sycamore? And also say why you like the one you choose best.
- VIII. This last is a very funny question. Will you write and tell us about the thing which you liked the best during your holiday? It may be a walk, or a drive, or a sunset, or a pig, or a party, or a game, or a person. Whatever you liked very much we should like to hear about.

THIS IS THE SORT OF EXAMINATION PAPER WHICH WILL BE SET FOR STANDARDS V. AND VI.

- I. What birds were singing during your holiday? Could you distinguish between their notes? Did you hear where the lark built her nest? or what sort of a home the blackbird or the swallow choose? Do the rooks wander or live always in the same trees?
- II. What time did the sun set during your holiday? Tell me some of the colours in the sky during the most beautiful sunset which you saw? Did you notice anything about the shadows of the trees just about the time the sun set? Did it rain much during your visit in the country? What did you observe about the flowers and the trees when it rained?
- III. Can you describe the two trees you like the best? and mention not only their leaves, but something about their trunks and the way the branches grow.
- IV. What are your favourite flowers? Could you tell the names of each flower which you brought home in your nosegay for mother?
- *V. Pick, press, and name in an exercise book the ten flowers which you like the best among the following:—Poppy, bramble, cranesbill or storksbill, mallow, harebell, convolvulus, toadflax, dandelion (leaf, flower, and seed), agrimony, speedwell, vetch or lady's fingers, succory, corncockle, hedge stachys or woundwort, knapweed, ragwort, ivy-leaved toadflax, selfheal, thistle, mint, willowherb, ragged robin, betony, white nettle.

*The pressed flowers will be seen by us and marks be given for them in examination.

- VI. When did you see the moon during your holiday? Was it a new moon, a full moon, or a waning moon? What makes the moon give light?
- VII. How many different sorts of grasses did you find? Tie them together in a nosegay and bring them back with you.
- VIII. Can you draw a goose? or a pig? What noises do they make? What are the differences in appearance between a goose and a duck?
- IX. What did you enjoy most during your holiday? Did you read any new books or learn a new game: or find out how to dig, or reap, or bud roses, or sow seeds, or climb trees, or to swim? Describe whatever gave you most pleasure.

You must not think, dear children, that you will have to answer these questions, but these are the sort of questions we shall ask, so as to see how much you have observed and learnt about the birds, and flowers, and trees, and sights, and sounds of the country, as well as the creatures which God has created. In enjoying the country pleasures you will be careful, we hope, not to tread down the corn or damage the hedges.

From 470 London schools children were sent into the country—out of that number the teachers of 52 schools were ready to encourage their children to join in our small plan; but at the conclusion of the holidays only 27 schools sent in replies to the questions, as only 330 children had written answers, though many instances were known where the questions had awakened curiosity, which, it is hoped, will this year lead to closer observation.

To *The Nineteenth Century* for July, 1900, I must refer my readers for examples of the children's replies, some of which showed a delightful and true appreciation of the possible joys which observation of Dame Nature and her cunning ways leads to, others which illustrate mainly credulity and ignorance; but although 330 is but a small proportion of 15,000, those of us who are trying this experiment are not discouraged. But help is needed, and it is in full confidence of the sympathy of every member of the P.N.E.U. in this small effort to extend its benefits to the children of the poor that this letter is written. The aid can be given in three ways:—

I. By those who will go to the London Schools, show pictures or sketches, and talk to the children about country sights and sounds, about animals and trees, flowers and birds, drawing attention to their habits, customs, and peculiarities. Arrangements can be made by communication with Mr. R. E. S. Hart or me, and, with the assistance of the teachers hitherto given unstintedly, far-reaching good can be done by those who love Nature or children, or both. There is no need that these talks should only take place in the summer. The thought of the country is good on drear winter days, and the long anticipation of the August visit might be blended with efforts which will make it more enjoyable when it comes.

II. By those who, living in the country, will interest themselves in the young London guests of their poor neighbours, and by taking them walking and talking, show them how to look, what to see, and some of the joys of watching. We all know the cruelty of children, cruelty born often not so much from unkindness as from ignorance and incapacity of imagining the feelings, possibilities, and limitations of the animal world. A microscope is a dumb, eloquent teacher, but it is not an obtainable one,

I fear, for the majority of these children, and, perhaps, not needed until they have learnt to look at what can be seen by the normal eye, and at all hours of outdoor life.

III. And, lastly, aid can be given by those who will speak to Mothers' Meetings and at Co-operative Guild gatherings on Nature and her study. If we could get the mothers of the industrial classes interested in the ideas and ideals of this Union, it would be a great stimulus to the children. Too often feeble tales and mild morality are offered at these meetings to women whose intelligence has been quickened by life's teaching, even if their stock of knowledge is scant, whereas talk about their children's characters, reference to habits familiar, but not hitherto thought important, reminders of the influence of Nature on their own lives, suggestions of possibilities for their families, would, it is believed, awaken in them new powers of observation and open new sources of information. This, however, is a big subject, and already this letter is long. I have written it to show one of the many ways by which the children of the poor may be introduced to "Mother Nature." The importance of doing so will be obvious to those who themselves find joy and rest in her friendship, and know that their neighbours, the poor, are among those who, even more than most people, need such joy and such rest—

"In Nature's lap the sad find hope."

I am, dear editor,

Yours very truly,

Warden's Lodge, Toynbee Hall,
Whitechapel, London, *July*, 1900.

HENRIETTA O. BARNETT.

THE PARENTS' REVIEW

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE
OF HOME-TRAINING AND CULTURE.

"Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, a life."

"CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME."

A STUDY OF BROWNING'S POETIC METHOD.*

BY W. BLAKE ODGERS, M.A., LL.D., Q.C.

SOME poets have an epic talent; they can tell a story well. They usually begin at the beginning, come gradually on to the middle, and then progress steadily to the end. They state all the facts as they occurred, in strict chronological order; and so give us an orderly narrative, clear and simple, such as any child can understand. And yet there is plenty of room for any amount of beautiful description, of sparkling conversation, and every kind of poetic embellishment. In most cases these "epic" poets, if I may call them so, tell us their story *ab extrâ*, from the outside. They describe everything as it would appear to a bystander who saw the occurrences really happening before his eyes; or as spectators in a theatre see the drama acted before them. We see what the characters do, we hear what they say, and from what they do and say we gather what is passing in their minds.

But this is not Robert Browning's method. What especially interested him was the working of the human heart, and the effect of external circumstances on the character and soul of man. He peers beneath external appearances, and ever asks himself, Given such and such a

* A lecture given to the Finchley Branch of the P.N.E.U.